

Union Station funding sought

Tuesday, April 19, 2011

By **JIM KINNEY**

Business writer

SPRINGFIELD - Connecticut is seeking \$227 million in additional federal transportation funding for the long planned high-speed passenger rail line linking New Haven with Springfield, with \$20 million to be spent on Springfield's Union Station.

The New Haven to Springfield project is part of a larger plan to improve passenger railroad service north through Vermont.

The money would go toward repairing pedestrian tunnels at the station to make the depot, constructed in 1926, comply with modern handicapped accessibility laws, said Timothy W. Brennan, executive director of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission.

But the competition for this money will be fierce. Brennan said the federal government has received \$10 billion worth of requests for an available \$2 billion in railroad construction funding. He expects the U.S. Department of Transportation to make its decision on funding this summer.

Overall, the complete rehabilitation of Union Station could cost \$70 million and would begin in the late summer of 2012. Work could be completed in 2015. But not all the funding is in place yet.

On April 4, the city announced that it had hired an architect and a project manager for the station. The contract calls for HDR Architecture to earn \$4.2 million for basic design services. Skanska USA Building Inc., an international firm with offices in Boston, has been hired to oversee construction at a cost of \$1.05 million.

Now, with this third-round of federal funding in play, the Planning Commission's board of directors voted Thursday night to support Connecticut's bid. Brennan said projects that have support from several states have a better chance of winning funding in Washington.

The project to improve rail service along the Connecticut River is vital for the region because it will connect Springfield with the heavily populated business corridor from Boston south to Washington, Brennan said.

"That's our future," he said.

Also last week, 17 federal lawmakers from Vermont, Massachusetts and Connecticut signed a letter supporting Connecticut's application. The list includes U.S. Sen. John F. Kerry, D-Mass., and U.S. Reps. Richard E. Neal, D-Springfield, and John W. Olver, D-Amherst.

The north-south rail line has received funding from the federal government before, Brennan said. Massachusetts was awarded \$73 million in 2010 to improve tracks from Springfield to the Vermont state line. That work could begin later this year if the state, Pan Am Railways and the federal Railroad Administration can reach an agreement. Pan Am, based in North Billerica, owns the north-south railroad running along the Connecticut River.

Vermont received \$50 million and that state signed an agreement with the Railroad Administration and Pan Am last week. Construction will start in Vermont this summer.

Connecticut has already received \$40 million for a 10-mile section of track in the first round of funding and \$121 million for further work in the second round.

Brennan said work on the \$40 million project could begin in the fall.

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